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ABSTRACT

This digest defines learning disabilities, cites their prevalence, describes typical characteristics of learning-disabled students, outlines educational implications of learning disabilities, and lists several printed and organizational resources for further information. (JDD)

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LEARNING DISABILITIES

What is meant by "learning disabilities"?

Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, defines learning disabilities (LD) as a "disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations."

The definition further states that LD includes perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. According to the law, LD does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, mental retardation, or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

Also required is a severe discrepancy between the child's potential (as measured by IQ) and his or her current status (as measured by achievement tests).

It is unfortunate that in practice the LD child may be a student who does not fit into any other category but still has problems learning to read, spell, write, solve arithmetic problems, or function in school. This often makes LD a "dumping ground" for students who need remedial education.

How many students have learning disabilities?

A wide range of prevalence estimates have appeared in the literature, anywhere from 1% to 30% of the general population, perhaps reflecting the variations in definitions. The most widely agreed upon range is 2% to 3%.

What are some typical characteristics of students who have learning disabilities?

Students who are learning disabled may exhibit a wide range of traits, including poor reading comprehension, spoken language, writing, and reasoning ability. Hyperactivity, inattention, and perceptual coordination problems may also be associated with LD, but are not examples of LD. Other traits that may be present include a variety of symptoms of brain dysfunction, including uneven and unpredictable test performance, perceptual impairments, motor disorders, and emotional characteristics such as impulsiveness, low tolerance for frustration, and maladjustment.

The major types of LD may be broken into disorders in four areas:

1. Spoken language: Delays, disorders, and deviations in listening and speaking.
2. Written language: Difficulties with reading, writing, and spelling.
3. Arithmetic: Difficulty in performing arithmetic functions or in comprehending basic concepts.
4. Reasoning: Difficulty in organizing and integrating thoughts.

What are the educational implications of learning disabilities?

Although there exist many teaching programs designed especially for LD children, Reynolds and Birch (1982) have suggested that the instruction required by most children who are called LD, educable mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, or behavior disordered is not readily distinguishable. A team approach is advocated to provide for their education in the mainstream setting.

Myers and Hammill (1982) underlined the importance for resource or special class teachers to match instructional systems in use in the regular classroom. Such an approach allows for discovering ways to modify the system for particular students as well as preparing them to return to the regular program.

REFERENCES FOR PARENTS

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Rogers, F. K. *Parenting the difficult child.* 1979. (Chilton Book Co., Radnor PA 19089)

Schoonover, R. J. *Handbook for parents of children with learning disabilities.* (Interstate Printers & Publishers, Inc., Danville IL 61832)

Stevens, S. H. *The learning disabled child: Ways that parents can help.* 1980. (John F. Blair Publisher, 1406 Plaza Dr., S.W., Winston-Salem NC 27103)

Taylor, J. F. *The hyperactive child and the family: The complete what-to-do handbook.* 1980. (Everest House, 1133 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10036)

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Johnson, S. W., & Morasky, R. L. *Learning disabilities.* 1980. (Allyn & Bacon, Inc., Longwood Division, Link Dr., Rockleigh NJ 07647)

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Mercer, C. D. *Children and adolescents with learning disabilities.* 1979. (Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1300 Alum Creek Dr., Columbus OH 43216)

Myers, P. I., & Hammill, D. D. *Learning disabilities. Basic concepts, assessment practices, and instructional strategies.* 1982. (Pro-Ed, 5341 Industrial Oaks Blvd., Austin TX 78735)

Osman, B. B. *No one to play with: The social side of learning disabilities.* 1982. (Random House, Inc., 201 E. Fiftieth St., New York NY 10022)

Reynolds, M. C., & Birch, J. W. *Teaching exceptional children in all America's schools.* 1982. (The Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Dr., Reston VA 22091)

Zigmond, N., Sansone, J., Miller, S. E., Donahoe, K. A., & Kohnke, R. *Teaching learning disabled students at the secondary school level.* 1986. (The Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Dr., Reston VA 22091)

RESOURCES

Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh PA 15234
412/341-1525

Association of LD Adults
P. O. Box 9722
Friendship Station
Washington DC 20016

Orton Dyslexia Society
724 York Road
Baltimore MD 21204
301/296-0232

Publication: *Bulletin of the Orton Society*

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

ERIC/CEC has a variety of other information sources on LD, including:

- *Computer Search Reprints*, annotated bibliographies from the ERIC and Exceptional Child Education Resources databases including these titles:
  #507 "Learning Disabled Adolescents: Programs, Curriculum, Teaching Methods"
  #525 "Learning Disabled Elementary School Students: Programs, Curriculum Guides, Teaching Methods"
  #546 "Learning Disabilities: Definitions, Assessment, and Eligibility Criteria"

  Price: $10.00 each; CEC member price, $8.50 each, from Publication Sales, The Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston VA 22091-1589
- *Custom Computer Searches* can provide you with a bibliography with abstracts on your special interest area related to the education of learning disabled students.
- *Division Publications* such as *The DLD Times*, a newsletter of The Division for Learning Disabilities, available through membership in CEC's LD division. For information, contact CEC Department of Member and Unit Services, 1920 Association Drive, Reston VA 22091-1589.
- *Learning Disability Focus* (twice yearly) and *Learning Disabilities Research* (twice yearly). Package subscription: Individual $25.00; Institution $32.00. Single copies available at $8.00. For information, contact CEC, Department of Member and Unit Services, 1920 Association Drive, Reston VA 22091-1589.

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